

MEMO	
Date	July 14, 2015
To:	Master Plan Implementation Committee
From:	Dennis Galvin, Bob Krankewicz, Susan Spuhler
Subject:	Field Interview, Land Use Subcommittee
Reference	Evan Belansky, Community Development Director, Chelmsford MA

1. On the above date at approximately 2.00PM, this reporter accompanied by Bob KRANKEWICZ and Susan SPUHLER, both of MPIC, interviewed Evan BELANSKY, the Community Development Director for the Town of Chelmsford MA. The interview took place at the Chelmsford Town Hall, 50 Billerica Road. Phone number for BELANSKY is 978-244-3341. He has been the Community Development Director for Chelmsford for seven years. He advised that the last Chelmsford Master Plan was completed in 2010.

2. BELANSKY advised that the town had a multi family residential by law which could be referenced in section 12 of the town's zoning by laws. He stated that the town was zoned geographically for multi family residential (RM). The area encompassed property along rte 110 and in sections of North Chelmsford MA. These areas have been zoned for multi-family residential for over ten years. The town has now achieved build out of its multi family zone. He said that the limits for residential zoning were 10-12 units per acre. He contrasted that with 15-17 units per acre for Chapter 40B developments. He noted that there has not been a lot of multi family development in Chelmsford of late.

3. The town of Chelmsford recently instituted a "Redevelopment By-law" which can be referenced under section 21 of the town's bylaws. The purpose of this bylaw was to transition commercial properties to residential. BELANSKY said that this new by law was innovative in that it created an overlay district over commercially zoned property to encourage residential development. Density was bumped in this new district to provide an incentive. The new overlay district allows a 8 unit development per acre to be constructed by right. Anything over 8 units requires a special permit. He also referenced a village center overlay district, which applied strictly to the center of Chelmsford. There were limits to the scale and size. The minimum square footage requirements were 700sf for a one bedroom unit, 900sf for a two bedroom unit and 1200sft for a three bedroom unit. The Master Plan created an expectation for more diversified housing and noted that the Housing Authority has partnered with the town. There aren't any restrictions on the number of bedrooms. This is something that the Planning Board and the Developer work out.

4. The town also passed an "Inclusionary Zoning" By Law. It was tied to the redevelopment bylaw and it gives commercial property owners a 100% density bonus. BELANSKY noted that if you want to encourage development you have to up the density. There is no real mandated number of affordable units. The chief feature of bylaw is that it requires a cash payment in lieu of affordable units to an affordable housing trust. The best method for expanding your affordable stock is to obtain payments in lieu of construction then place them in a fund. The fund coupled with CPC money should be able to provide enough funds to enable the town to support or subsidize "affordable housing" construction in the town. BELANSKY discussed incentives to draw developers away from Chapter 40B projects. He said that developers like PRINCETON and AVALON have designed business models that allow them to operate exclusively in the Chapter 40B realm. This gives them a density of 15 units per acre. They are not afraid to open their books as well. BELANSKY said that local developers don't want to open their books. If a town is willing to approximate the density bonuses in a straight development most of them will go through the town process.

5. Insist on standards. BELANSKY said that it would be necessary to have an experienced consultant word the design standards for you. He stressed that if you want to achieve something with the bylaw be careful to actually spell it out.

6. BELANSKY shared the town's minimum dimensions with us. The Town's minimum lot size is 40,000 sf. The minimum frontage is 150'. The town's affordable housing level is now listed at 8 ½%. With regard to the multi-family/redevelopment by law, the density per acre is 8 units. This is the base zone. Chelmsford uses it as the dividing line between large and small developments. More than 8 units per acre and you are talking about a special permit.

7. Another thing that Chelmsford has offered developers is a streamlined process. We guarantee a permit for a by-right project in 90 days. For special permit projects we guarantee 120 days. He has also greatly diminished the role of the ZBA, so there is one stop shopping. The Planning Board does the site plan review and they are elected; we have forwarded most of the duties to them. They handle all of the redevelopment, not the ZBA. It is the Planning Board that negotiates all aspects of a project. They enforce the standards. We have almost a flexible zoning bylaw. The two factors that developments care about are time and predictability.

8. We discussed the process of selecting zones. BELANSKY restated that the redevelopment zone is an overlay. He has tried to stay away from changes to the zoning map, however, the Planning Board is finding that over time, areas that were zoned commercial are no longer being used for this, so they may have to be rezoned. The concept in the "redevelopment overlay district" was simple, the town simply allowed for residential development in all its commercial zones. Industrial zones are still off limits. Allowing residential in the commercial zone will draw if the density is there. The areas that have been effected by this decision are Littleton Road, Chelmsford Street and North Chelmsford. Any place that is viewed as a commercial corridor would be a place where this should be contemplated.

9. Another issue to consider is historical impact. Chelmsford is now grappling with this. As it redevelops, it is important to have a process for identifying and preserving historical sites and working this into the process. A Historic Mill District by law is being considered.

10. The thing to remember is to make your expectations in the bylaw explicit. "Say what you mean and mean what you say." Look for the pluses to justify your change in direction. If you want to justify mixed or multi use remember that you will reduce traffic, increase property values and increase your excise tax receipts. Tell this to the voters.

11. We briefly discussed Transfer of Development Rights as a concept. BELANSKY said that he did not have much experience with it. He pointed to the town of Ipswich as having a working TDR and recommended that we speak to them.

12. BELANSKY advised that the rte 110 corridor from Chelmsford into Westford was ideally suited for mixed use residential. All the projections indicate this. He stated that all along rte 110, particularly in Westford, where there are now several businesses, one and two family residential units mixed in with the commercial properties should move. He said that many people are commuting out of Boston to Westford and would like the option to live there but they can't afford it. If they could move out to apartments or small multi family units they could get to know the community and then as their incomes and equity increase they could buy out here. There is not much danger of increased kids in the schools with one and two family residential units.

13. A rough sketch of Westford was viewed during this interview and a general discussion was had with regard to areas conducive to multi family units. BELANSKY quickly identified the route 110 and route 40 corridor as places where one and two bedroom mixed use structures could go. Nabnasset, Forge Village and Graniteville could be receptive to smaller scale mixed use to accommodate older residents. BELANSKY offered that older residents, when they downsize do not generally like to move to apartments located on major corridors.

14. We discussed the preparation of the bylaw in the implementation phase. It was strongly suggested that a consultant be brought in. BELANSKY estimated that the cost to Chelmsford for putting together several bylaws to support the Redevelopment concept, which is officially referred to as the "Community Enhancement and Overlay District" by law, cost about 60K. He advised that the consultant used was Howard Stein and Hudson. The specific consultant was a man named Ted BROWITZ who BELANSKY said is now on his own as an independent.

15. BELANSKY also cautioned that before we do anything, we need to make sure that our use table and our definitions are correct. He commented on the situation in Westford with the Asphalt plant. He said that what Chelmsford did was to define what heavy manufacturing was and then zone it all out of town.

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